REPRESENTATIVE FRENCH CRITICISM OF *LES ROUGON-MACQUART* 1873-1895

BY

LUCIEN WENDELL WHITE

A. B., Augustana College, 1935

A. M., University of Illinois, 1944

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
FRENCH IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
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FOREWORD

The first six volumes (1871-1876) of the Rougon-Marquart series received very little attention from contemporary critics, although Zola was already well known as the author of *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) and *Madeleine Férat* (1868).

Two factors contributed to the silence which greeted the beginning of his new literary effort. In the first place, political conditions were very unsettled during this period. From 1871 to 1873 the Germans were occupying France, and after 1873 the attention of the public was drawn for the next few years to the political struggle which was to determine whether France would remain a republic or return to the monarchy. Most of the literary reviews had gone out of existence during the Commune in 1871, and the newspapers that remained were occupied by more pressing matters than the latest novels. In the second place, critical opinion during this period was dominated by conservatives, who seem to have opposed Zola's first Rougon-Macquart novels with a conspiracy of silence.

However, with the appearance of *L'Assommoir*, first in *feuilleton* in 1876 and then in book form in 1877, there arose a flurry of criticism, mostly adverse, and similar manifestations, though varying in intensity, occured after all the following Rougon-Macquart volumes.

Zola's critics may be classified generally in four groups. There were first of all the conservative Catholic critics, with royalist sympathies. The chief representatives of this group were Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly and Armand de Pontmartin. The opinion of these critics was likely to be conditioned by their political and religious views, which led them to associate naturalism with the republic and attached to both the stigma of immorality.

A second group of critics was composed of professors who, in addition to their instructional duties, devoted themselves to literary criticism. The principal figures of this group were Edmond Scherer, Timothée Colani, Ferdinand Brunetière, Georges Renard, Gustave Larroumet, Edouard Rod, Emile Faguet, René Doumic and Georges Pellissier. Their general reception of Zola,s Rougon-Macquart novels was not less adverse than that of the conservative royalists, although it was based, perhaps, on sounder critical principles.

The chief representatives of the third type of critics, the impressionists, were Anatole France and Jules Lemaitre, both of whom were adversely impressed by most of Zola's work, although Lemaitre was occasionally sympathetic.

The naturalistic critics themselves comprised the fourth group. Of these, Paul Alexis, Emile Hennequin, and Louis Desprez were the most prominent. Only Paul Alexis of this group gave Zola his unqualified praise. Both Hennequin and Desprez had certain reservations to make, as will be seen later.

In addition to the critics mentioned above, there were others who, though known principally as creative authors, expressed to a greater or lesser degree

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their opinion on the merit of Zola's novels. Among these may be included Flaubert, Huysmans, Paul Bourget, and Edmond Rostand.

A preliminary survey of the opinion of these critics and of others not mentioned here indicated that contemporary critics of Zola's Rougon-Macquart novels were largely concerned with evaluating four aspects of these novels--namely, their scientific validity, their verity, their morality, and their esthetic worth. As further investigation bore out these indications, it was decided to make these four questions the subject of the chapters of this study.

It became evident very soon that it would be useful to analyse Zola's own critical writings in connection with these topics, for it was in the light of Zola's own critical manifestoes that most of the literary criticism of the Rougon-Macquart novels was developed. Consequently each of the four chapters of this study begins with an analysis of Zola's theories of the novel and, with this background, analyses the critical opinion which the subject of the chapter involves. Except where the interests of logic dictate some slight change in arrangement, criticism in each chapter is presented in chronological order.

The year 1873 was set as the beginning of this study because Paul Bourget's article entitled "Le Roman réaliste et le roman piétiste," the first important article which devoted any considerable space to Zola's *Rougon-Macquart,* was published during that year in the *Revue des Deux Mondes.* The year 1895, two years after the publication of the last of *Les Rougon-Macquart,* was chosen for the conclusion in order to include a certain amount of criticism based on a general view of the whole completed series.

I. SCIENTIFIC VALIDITY

The growing prestige of science and of the scientific method at the start of Zola's literary career was the decisive factor in the formation of his literary theory. To be sure, he had the example of Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and the Goncourt brothers, who had already, to a greater or lesser degree, reduced the part of imagination in the novel and based it on exact observation. But Zola, with his theory of naturalism, attempted to apply to the novel not only the observational element of the scientific method but the experimental element as well. The result was the experimental novel, which, according to Zola, was the proper instrument of the author living in a scientific era, when the domain of imagination was yielding on all sides to the advance of the sciences.

The purpose of the experimental novel was to extend into the field of human behavior, both individual and social, the methods which, during the previous two decades, had enabled the scientist to discover many physiological laws and which, according to Zola, would enable the novelist to discover the laws of human conduct.

In his attempt to show the cause-effect relationship in human behavior, Zola adopted a philosophy of determinism, formulated under the influence of Taine's theory of heredity and environment. For his information about the factor of heredity he relied on a theory developed by Dr. Prosper Lucas in his *Traité de l'hérédite naturelle;* for his understanding of environment he relied on care-

ful "scientific" documentation. With these two guides Zola proposed to demonstrate in his Rougon-Macquart novels the determinism which ruled a given family living under the Second Empire.

Contemporary critics rejected almost unanimously the validity of this demonstration, attacking it from two sides. In the first place, they failed to see in Zola's Rougon-Macquart family any clear-cut demonstration of heredity. Timothée Colani, for example, said that the characters of the Rougon-Macquart series did not possess an "air de famille" and asserted that the only thing they had in common was their absence of similarity. In the case of Nana, Louis Ulbach maintained that Zola's theory of heredity and environment was nowhere visible. Marie Déraismes said that there was a *non sequitur* in the fact that Nana, though the product of four generations of alcoholics, was such a perfect physical specimen. Maxime Gaucher, quoting a medical friend, claimed that Nana, given her parentage, was physiologically impossible.

The appearance of *Le Docteur Pascal* in 1893, with its lengthy explanation of Zola's scientific theories, only added strength to the critical opinion that refused to recognize *Les Rougon-Macquart* as a work of science. Gustave Larroumet, writing in 1893, found that the good Doctor Pascal, with his uncertainties and hesitations, almost destroyed Zola's idea of heredity on which the whole work was constructed. The conclusion of Zola's research appeared to be, said Larroumet, that the child about to be born at the end of the book was an unknown quantity, who, it was hoped, would be the contrary of all his ancestors.

Zola's representation of science in the person of Doctor Pascal was likewise ridiculed by Emile Faguet, who said that, if Pascal was a man of science for Zola, he certainly was not for the reader. He was rather a composite Bouvard and Pécuchet, the Don Quixote of the Rougon-Macquart family.

The validity of Zola's demonstration was also attacked on the grounds that the novel could not be the instrument of a scientific experiment. Edouard Scherer, writing in 1879, stated that when Zola traced a parallel between his work and Claude Bernard's he showed a complete lack of understanding of the meaning of the terms that he employed. A physiological experiment, said Scherer, was performed under certain conditions where the object in question was observed and the results noted. The person conducting the experiment did not invent nature or its laws, nor did he produce the creations on which the laws acted. Once the experiment was begun and the conditions set up, the results were entirely independent of the will of the experimenter. What resemblance, asked Scherer, was there between this type of procedure and that of a writer who got out of his own mind the characters, their actions, and the results?

Zola's novels, according to Scherer and many other critics, might be based on observation, but they were not a work of experimentation. Ferdinand Brunetière asserted that to experiment on Coupeau (*L'Assommoir*) in a scientific manner would mean taking a Coupeau into custody, intoxicating him daily with supervised dosages and then dissecting him for study as soon as a clear-cut case of alcoholism was established. Anything less than this, said Brunetière, could not be called experimentation.

Only the naturalistic writer Louis Desprez gave any support to Zola's claim that he was performing an experiment in his novels. In his *Evolution naturaliste*, published in 1884, he took direct issue with the argument advanced by Brunetière that an actual dissection would have to be done before an experiment was accomplished. He argued that to experiment on Coupeau would mean setting up an hypothesis, studying a certain number of cases like Coupeau, and then making the logical deductions, which might or might not lead to a modification of the original hypothesis. But Desprez pointed out as well the difficulties of making an experiment even in this attenuated sense of the word; for, though it might be done with some validity on a man of Coupeau's type, it became increasingly difficult, as one examined more and more complex personalities, to establish the proper controls for a scientific experiment.

Thus the critics were willing to give Zola some authority as an observer, but as an experimenter, the second component of which, according to Zola, scientists and novelists should be made--here there were none, except Louis Desprez, with his qualified support, who attached any validity to Zola's scientific claims.

II. VERITY

The chief characteristic of the realistic and naturalistic novel between 1850 and 1890 was an insistence on verity, based on close observation and documentation concerning the subjects and milieux involved. This dominant trait was due both to the rising prestige of the sciences and the scientific method after the middle of the century and to an increasing dissatisfaction with the later romanticism as a form of artistic expression.

These two factors had an important part in the formation of Zola's literary theory, which insisted that verity based on scientific observation was the *sine qua non* of the novel in a scientific age. Though imagination had reigned with Alexandre Dumas,Eugène Sue, and Victor Hugo, earning them the admiration of the public, Zola pointed out that great contemporary novelists like Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers, and Daudet followed the methods of Stendhal and Balzac, whose greatness resided in the accuracy of their observations of man and of nature.

Although a few critics gave qualified support to Zola's claim that his own work was the result of careful observation and documentation, the majority of them attacked vigorously the verity of his social pictures. The adverse criticism may be divided into two general types: criticism which pointed out the falsity of certain details of the Rougon-Macquart novels and criticism which attacked as false the pessimism of Zola's picture of man and of society.

Colani, Pontmartin, Brunetière, and other critics pointed out inaccuracies of observation in Zola's characterization of the courtesan in *Nana* as well as in the description of the world in which Nana lived. Other critics denied the verity of Zola's picture of conditions among the miners in *Germinal*. Henry Duhamel asserted, for example, ahat the miners' houses were clean and comfortable rather than dirty and odious as Zola had pictured them. Anatole Claveau objected that in *Germinal* Zola misrepresented the language of the miner and certain of their

speech habits, an objection that was repeated by Anatole France with regard to Zola's peasants in *La Terre* and by Jules Lemaitre with regard to Zola's artists in *L'Oeuvre.*

Another critic objected to inaccuracies in Zola's description of railroad life in *La Bête humaine,* asserting that, although the public admired Zola's documentation on the railroads, competent railroad men found it very unreliable. This was characteristic of the reception of Zola's books, said this critic. Engineers admired his portrayal of politics, and politicians found him peerless in the description of a mine or a farm, but the experts in each of these fields found many errors and little sign of any extensive first-hand observation.

The second criticism of the verity of the Rougon-Macquart novels was even more common than the first--that is, the objection that it was distorted by Zola's pessimistic and brutal picture of man and of society. Louis Desprez, though a naturalistic writer himself, pointed out the difference between Corneille, who represented man simply as an intelligence, and Zola, who was exclusively concerned with the body. The sociologist Guyau asserted that Zola eliminated from his books *le beau* in the same systematic manner that the classic writers had eliminated *le laid.* Jules Lemaitre, defining poetry as a transformation of reality, said that Zola was the epic poet of man's bestiality, since he devoted himself exclusively to the study of man's blind instincts and lowest passions, eliminating everything else. According to Lemaitre, Zola seemed to have followed the idea of Delacroix who once stated that every human face with a few simple changes could be made to resemble the face of an animal.

Unfavorable criticism of the brutality of Zola's work began with his second novel of the Rougon-Macquart series, *La Curée,* written in 1871 and increased in violence as Zola tended more and more to emphasize the more brutal aspects of man and society. Paul Bourget remarked an absence of soul in the characters of *La Curée;* Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly charged that in *Le Ventre de Paris* Zola saw only the material side of society and the physical side of man, and he condemned the portrayal of primitive instincts in *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret.* The appearance of *L'Assommoir* in 1877 was greeted by a storm of criticism, which asserted that Zola vilified and maligned the working-man. Although *Nana,* in 1880, was a study of a character necessarily base and vicious, there were critics who found that even here Zola's work was falsified by an overemphasis of the bestial in man. Louis Ulbach, for exemple, asserted that there was a vague phosphorescence like a soul hovering over the mud in *La Fille Elisa* of the Goncourt brothers; but in *Nana* he found not a glimmer to remind him that such vile creatures were, after all, of the same flesh and sex as our own mothers and sisters.

But complaints against Zola's brutal picture of man reached a peak with the publication of *La Terre* in 1887. As in the case of the working-man in *L'Assommoir,* published ten years before, critics in general found that Zola had given a low, base, and distorted picture--this time of the French peasant. The most important manifestations were the "Manifeste des Cinq" and Brunetière's article, "La Banqueroute du naturalisme." The "Manifeste" was published on the first page of *Le Figaro* on August 18, 1887. It was signed by five young naturalistic

writers--Paul Bonnetain, J. H. Rosny, Lucien Descaves, Paul Margueritte, and Gustave Guiches-- who now violently denounced Zola and renounced his leadership because of the filth and brutality of his work. Brunetière, who had been waging war against the naturalists for twelve years in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, asserted that *La Terre* meant the bankruptcy of naturalism. Zola's peasants, according to Brunetière, were completely false. To be peasants they would have to be men, but they were not even beasts. Their sole concern was eating, drinking, and other animal functions, with the emphasis on the last.

La Débâcle, Zola's historical and military novel, did not escape the criticism that he saw only the ugly and the lowest in life. In this case he was charged with vilifying the name of his country and with making brutes of France's brave soldiers.

The conclusion of most of Zola's contemporary critics was that the evidences of incomplete observation and the brutal pessimism of *Les Rougon-Macquart* showed these novels to be primarily a work of imagination rather than of observation. This was necessitated in a large part, wrote Jules Lemaitre, by the fact that Zola was not writing about a contemporary period but about one of twenty years earlier. Hence his "documents" consisted largely of the impressions of his youth, which were necessarily indistinct and incomplete. It was further pointed out by other critics that, even if Zola supplemented his earlier impressions with on-the-spot observations twenty years later, these observations would not be exact for the earlier period.

But, in addition to the fact that Zola was writing about a period twenty years earlier, critics pointed out a second reason to suppose that Zola's work was largely imagination--the fact that he started it with a preconceived philosophy and a preconceived plan. Not only were these an invention to start with, but it was illogical ao assume that subsequent documentation would fit automatically into the framework that was already set up, without being supported by numerous fabrications.

Georges Pellissier, pointing out Zola's double handicap of writing about a period twenty years removed and of having a preconceived plan, said that in trying to overcome the first handicap Zola was forced either to commit a continual anachronism by transposing contemporary observations to a period twenty years earlier or to replace his "réalité prise sur le fait" with laborious reading and "documents humains" gleaned from libraries. To overcome the handicap of the preconceived plan, said Pellissier, Zola was compelled to regiment and discipline reality by subordinating it to the requirements of his plan, completing it by whatever inventions his animalistic theory and the logical progression of the action demanded.

Thus the conclusion of Lemaitre and Pellissier and of many other critics was that Zola, by his free use of imagination and by his constant arrangement of reality to suit his purposes, was primarily a romantic writer, who found in his theory of heredity a convenient hook on which to hang his romanticism.

They added weight to these assertions by calling attention to certain typically romantic traits which Zola possessed, such as the use of personifications and

symbols, and other romantic techniques. Numerous examples of personifications were cited, such as the garden of Paradou in *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret,* the market in *Le Ventre de Paris,* the alambic in *L'Assommoir,* the department store in *Au Bonheur des Dames.* the mine in *Germinal,* the cathedral in *Le Rêve,* the locomotive in *La Bête humaine,* the Bourse in *L'Argent,* and the genealogical tree in *Le Docteur Pascal.* The constant use of personifications and symbols by Zola prompted many critics to compare him to Victor Hugo, in whose works these traits were common.

Two other romantic techniques pointed out by critics of Zola's novels were his use of dramatic and exceptional events and his fondness for antithesis. Among the exceptional events were cited the runaway locomotive in *La Bête humaine,* the mine disaster in *Germinal,* the tragic death of Coupeau in *L'Assommoir,* and the several unusual deaths in *Le Docteur Pascal.* Critics pointed out examples of antithesis not only in the individual works of *Les Rougon-Macquart,* but also in the arrangement and order of the series, which proceeded regularly in contrasts, *L'Assommoir* being followed by *Une Page d'amour, Nana* being followed by *Au Bonheur des Dames, Germinal* being followed by *L'Oeuvre,* and *La Terre* being followed by *Le Rêve.*

Not only did the majority of the critics insist on the important role of romanticism in Zola's Rougon-Macquart novels, but many of them asserted that his real talent lay in that direction and praised especially the romantic vision with which he moved and animated crowds, a trait especially praised in *La Débâcle.*

Zola himself was not unaware of his romantic tendencies, admitting that his youth had been steeped in the romanticism of Hugo and that as a result he magnified and poetized his subjects. But he insisted that his departure from strict observation was always based on exact foundations and was always in the direction of truth.

III. MORALITY

Just as Zola claimed for the novelist the same scientific and observational methods that directed the scientist, he claimed similarly for the novelist the same moral intentions that guided the scientist--that is the desire to know the causes of physical phenomena in order to direct and modify them to man's advantage.

Thus Zola sought to forestall and to answer charges of immorality that were made against his Rougon-Macquart novels by asserting that they were demonstrations of the causes of immorality and vicious social conditions which could be remedied only by these frank scientific studies. He pointed out, for example, the salutary social effect of *L'Assommoir,* with its picture of progressive drunkenness and degradation, followed by shame and death, and of *Nana,* in which, he said, was illustrated the determinism of the prostitute's origin and her destructive social effects.

Not only did Zola insist on the morality of his own work, but he devoted numerous pages of criticism to exposing the immorality of romantic and idealistic literature. It was this literature, he said, that corrupted morals, since it ex-

cited the imagination with half-veiled inferences and suggestions, whereas naturalistic literature with its full and frank pictures left nothing to stimulate impure or improper thoughts.

The essence of Zola's moral claims was that the experimental novel, by its scientific study and frank revelation of the evil aspects of man and society, not only sought to find the causes of these evils, but also served as a moral lesson by showing the consequence that they brought. In these claims he was supported by a considerable number of critics. Philippe Gille, for example, saw in *L'Assommoir* a powerful sermon against drunkenness in the Parisian slums and Georges Pellissier, though condemning Zola's work in general, saw a high moral lesson in *La Débâcle* with its picture of France's inner rot and imperial corruption.

The most eloquent defender of the morality of Zola's novels was Louis Desprez, who included in his *Evolution naturaliste*, a seventy-five page study of Zola and of his work up to that time, including the first eleven of the Rougon-Macquart novels. Taking *L'Assommoir* as an example, Desprez said that Zola had been bold enough to brave the hypocritical Puritanism of his contemporaries and to write the truth, which he, as a social historian, was conscience-bound to do.By doing so he pointed the way to the legislator and to the social worker to remove the causes of the conditions illustrated in *L'Assommoir*. Desprez admitted that not all of Zola's novels were as significant socially as *L'Assommoir*, but he asserted that there was a lesson in every one of them. In *Nana*, he removed from her gilded pedestal the poetic *Dame aux Camelias* and showed the work of ruin and death that she wrought; in *Pot-Bouille*, he revealed the vices of bourgeois traditions and outlined the multiple causes of adultery.

But in spite of Zola's persistent propaganda and the eloquent apology of Louis Desprez, the majority of the critics kept up a constant barrage of articles directed against Zola's novels, asserting that his moral purpose, if it existed, was nullified in his novels because of their picture of obscenity and vice, their fatalistic philosophy, their fundamental irreligion, and their lack of patriotism.

Prominent among the critics of the asserted immorality of *Les Rougon-Macquart* were the Catholic and legitimist critics, Armand de Pontmartin and Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, who wrote in the columns of the *Gazette de France* and the *Constitutionnel* repeated warnings against the obscenity and the demoralizing effects of Zola's work. Pointing to the recitals of crime, drunkenness, vice and obscenity that filled Zola's books, Pontmartin remarked that they might all be a true reflection of a society rotted since the inauguration of the Republic, but that to fill the printed page wth such materials demoralized society from the top while it decomposed at the bottom and made literature the servant of all kinds of vice, with the result that, in the end, it was difficult to say whether the novelist got his information from the criminal or the criminal got his information from the novelist. Barbey d'Aurevilly likewise saw in Zola's work both a symptom of the vice and corruption of the Republic and a threat to old French society.

But these arch-defenders of old French society were by no means alone in their accusations that Zola's novels were obscene and hence immoral. Phillippe Gille wrote of *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* that the subject was perilous, the details

dangerous; Louis Ulbach described *Nana* as merely a series of obscene tableaux, entirely devoid of moral purpose; Brunetière asserted that Zola's sole originality in *La Terre* was to print brazenly words that he would never dare to use in conversation.

Even Zola's so-called "chaste" novels did not escape the charge of immorality. *L'Oeuvre,* Zola's description of the world of artists, was described as chaste neither in situation nor in language. *Le Rêve,* which Zola had said was proper reading for any girl, was described as obscene, because of the detailed references to the secret longings of the heroine and because of repeated references to the inability of her step-parents to have children.

How, asked the critics, could Zola claim that this constant parade of vicious, obscene, and sensuous pictures contained a high moral lesson? Who would believe that the death of Coupeau in *delirium tremens* would reform a single drunkard or that Nana's death from smallpox in the last chapter would erase from the mind of a girl of the people the tale of luxury and pleasure that the previous chapters unfolded? Moreover, if Zola's moral purpose was based, as it appeared to some critics, on a system of rewards for virtue and punishment for evil, it was nullified by two factors. In the first place, said these critics, operation of such a system was not obvious in his work. Nana's death, for example, was not a clear-cut example of retribution, since she died of smallpox which she caught from her son on returning from Berlin. Octave and Trublot, in *Pot-Bouille,* suffered no discomforts in spite of their evil conduct. On the other hand, some of Zola's virtuous characters met an unhappy end. The heroic Sylvère and the irreproachable Miette were both shot down like thieves in *La Fortune des Rougon,* and Caboche, the honest and devoted railroad worker, was condemned to hard labor for life in *La Bête humaine.*

Critics pointed out also a second factor which nullified a system of morality based on rewards and punishments. The reader realized that the denouement of a novel was optional. Not all drunkards died in *delirium tremens* like Coupeau; not all persons like the incestuous Renée went insane; and some women of Nana's profession ended their lives in ease and comfort. The reader could draw his own conclusion about these things, and it probably was that he could share in these exciting vices of Zola's heroes without necessarily sharing in the retribution that sometimes visited them.

Although the accusation of obscenity and vice in Zola's work arose largely from his concept of man as a "bête humaine," a second accusation against the morality of his novels arose even more directly from this concept; for to consider man as a product of his heredity and environment, like an animal, was to eliminate the will as a factor in human existence. Thus, not only was Nana vicious because of her temperament and environment, but Pauline, in *La Joie de vivre,* was virtuous for the same reasons. Similarly Angélique, in *Le Rêve,* was good because she embroidered chasubles and lived in the shadows of a great cathedral. Numerous critics warned of the dangers of any general acceptance of Zola's physiological concept of the will, since society was based on the idea that man was responsible for his acts.

A third objction often voiced againts the morality of Zola's Rougon-Macquart novels was that in them he omitted or maligned religion. Barbey d'Aurevilly and others accused Zola of slandering the priest in his *Faute de l'abbé Mouret;* Pontmartin made certain specific charges of irreligion with regard to *L'Assommoir* and *L'Oeuvre*. S. Savvas-Pacha wrote a long indictment of the religious implications of *Le Docteur Pascal*, which, he said was full of dangerous pantheistic doctrines and was a complete denial of the existence of God.

Some critics presented a fourth objection to the morality of Zola's novels. It was that they were unpatriotic and harmful to France as a country, both at home and in opinion abroad. These objections centered chiefly around Zola's military novel, *La Débâcle*, which depicted France's defeat at the hands of Germany in 1870. Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, for example, deplored the sad and wretched picture that Zola drew of the defeated French nation and said that the proper way to draw a moral lesson from this subject would have been to bring to grips the French and German spirit and to show how the French spirit was superior to the German even in defeat. Zola's answer to these charges was the same as his general defense of the morality of his works. True patriotism, he asserted, did not consist in that kind of heroic madness in which the individual sacrficed his life for his country. It consisted rather in an exact knowledge of the country's needs and in the study and application of the sciences which would guarantee her safety and welfare.

But the critics refused for the most part to accept Zola's pious claims of morality, and many of them questioned his sincerity, viewing him as a literary quack, a charlatan, who was ready to write anything for financial sucess. Marie Déraismes repeated again and again the charge that Zola's purpose was not moral but commercial. When fame and fortune were slow to arrive, she said, Zola wrote *L'Assommoir* as a trial balloon, and it showed him the direction to take in order to find them. Brunetière asserted that Zola was mathematician enough to see that his sales increased in proportion to the obscenity of his work.

The feeling that Zola was a commercial writer was intensified among the critics by the vigorous press campaign that Zola conducted between 1875 and 1881, with the result that he was referred to as a Barnum of publicity and comments were made on his bad taste in continually referring to himself. He was even suspected of using the critics to his advantage by courting unfavorable reviews in order to get publicity which would increase his sales. So little were Zola's purposes trusted and so well known were his publicity schemes that even the writers of the "Manifeste des Cinq" were accused of conspiring with Zola to spread his reputation for scabrous writing.

IV. ESTHETICS

Zola's critical writings contain little about the form and technique of the novel, since it was his professed belief that these were a natural consequence of the use of the experimental method. When the novelist had carefully gathered his documents and scrupulously studied the milieu which they involved, the plan of the work, according to Zola, was furnished by the documents themselves, for the facts

fell into a logical order and the plot composed itself on the basis of the notes taken. The characters developed in the same way, one fact leading logically to the next, so that each characterization arose naturally and spontaneously out of the accumulation of documents assembled.

There were a great many critics who objected that they could not see the natural development of plot and character which, in Zola's theory, was supposed to derive from the logical arrangement of the documents and who objected further that Zola's description were often excessive and boring.

Paul Bourget, in 1873, was one of the first to complain that Zola's plots were too tenuous. Louis Ulbach, Timothée Colani, Pontmartin, Faguet, and others made similar objections, stating, for example, that the novel *Nana* had no beginning, middle, or end, and that any part of *L'Argent* might have been left out, so loosely arranged was the plot. In a long disquisition against *Les Rougon-Macquart*, published in the *Nouvelle Revue* over a period of several months in 1893, S. Savvas-Pacha declared that Zola's books were not art and therefore not novels, since they had no unity of action as defined by Aristotle, Horace and Boileau.

In the matter of character development, Zola's novels were the subject of even more adverse criticism than in the matter of plot, for his character, like his plots, developed as a natural consequence of the documents assembled, with the result that little attention was given to character analysis. Consequently the critics often found Zola's characters mechanical and colorless. In *Nana*, in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, and in *Germinal*, according to Emile Hennequin, Zola had so simplified the mechanism of his characters that they seemed to lose their individuality. The reader, he pointed out, seeing these creatures react without hesitation or reflection and always in the same pattern, felt sometimes that they were too simple to be human. It was for this reason that Brunetière referred to Zola's characters as puppets which, he said, traversed all his novels with the same mechanical and angular movements.

A number of critics called attention to Zola's summary method of outlining a character. He would always pick out the dominant trait and then insist on it with continual repetition. Thus certain epithets were always attached to certain individuals according to their dominant characteristic. That this simple psychology worked fairly well with simple people and with crowds was the opinion of many critics, but they felt that it was a defect in Zola's art that he was unable, either because of a native lack of penetration or because of his naturalistic theories, to delve deeper into the inner workings of the mind.

Closely allied to the criticism of Zola's lack of plot and his simplified characterization was the objection to his excessive and detailed description; for with Zola description of the milieu and his documents were the substitute for plot and characterization. Although Zola's descriptive power was often praised, especially when dealing with crowds, his descriptions on the whole were found to be tedious, uninspired, and ineffective. Barbey d'Aurevilly complained that in *Le Ventre de Paris* Zola painted everything that came into view, like a mechanical palette, making the same error as the painter Courbet, only worse. Colani objected that Zola's only descriptive technique was to enumerate and to catalogue, registering

faithfully each object, big and small, noting its color and its odor, and when he had reached the end of his list he thought he had composed a tableau. Critics sometimes compared Zola's method of adding detail on detail to the work of a brickmason who placed stones one on the other in monotonous succession.

But critical objections to Zola's treatment of plot, character, and description were not the only ones, from the point of view of esthetics, to arise from Zola's use of the scientific method in the novel. A further objection was that this method, in its attempt to embrace and to examine all aspects of life with the candid eye of science, introduced into the novel materials which were in themselves inartistic and which were not the proper subjects for artistic study.

The most obvious example of this was Zola's attempt to introduce the experimental methods of science into the novel, in spite of the express statement of his idol, Claude Bernard, that science and the arts were by definition entirely different in purpose and in procedure. Claude Bernard's objections were made from the scientific standpoint, since he felt that literature could not perform a scientific function. The objections of Zola's critics were made from the literary standpoint, since they felt that science could not perform a literay function.

Marius Topin, writing in 1876, found that Zola was best when his scientific pretension was least apparent. Pontmartin ridiculed the idea of heredity and the medical details which, he said, made *Une Page d'amour* difficult to read. Pontmartin asserted further that the novel would never survive in the attempt to complete with books of chemistry, medicine, experimental psychology, etc. The appearance of *Le Docteur Pascal* in 1893, with its long explanation of the system of heredity and other scientific propositions, occasioned a final wave of criticism which insisted that art and science do not mix. Gustave Frédérix, for example, stated concerning *Le Docteur Pascal* that the value of Zola's scientific theories was a problem to be examined at some other time, but of one thing he was sure, that their presence slowed the movement of the novel and detracted from its interest.

In addition to the introduction of science into the novel, Zola's method brought in a vast amount of professional, technical, and trade terms, which, in the opinion of many contemporary critics, were not suited to a literary work. The insertion of detailed descriptions of the markets (*Le Ventre de Paris*), of flowers and perfumes (*La Faute de l'abbé Mouret*), of the zincworker's trade (*L'Assommoir*), of the department store (*Au Bonheur des Dames*), of mining operations (*Germinal*), of weaving (*Le Rêve*), of the financial world (*L' Argent*) of railroad (*La Bête humaine*)' and of births (*Pot-Bouille, La Joie de vivre,* and *La Terre*), aroused the frequent ironic comment among critics that, however slight the literary value of Zola's novels, they could at least claim some practical distinction as cook books, obstetrical guides, etc. The effect of all this technical display, said René Doumic, was either to bore the reader or make him laugh, for most of it meant nothing to the average individual. Similarly Pontmartin remarked that to understand Zola's novels one would have to be a combination of every kind of scientist and specialist.

There arose also the additional criticism that certain other subjects, generally considered improper for public or polite discussion, were intrinsically unesthetic and therefore not suited to treatment in the novel. Philippe Gille objected that there were certain details which even if true, ought never to be printed, and certain pictures should never be painted or, at least, should be turned to the wall. Zola's error in *L'Assommoir,* said Barbey d'Aurevilly, was in believing that a work of art could be made out of dirt. This book, said Barbey, was no more literature than it was moral, for the use of ignoble materials debased art and made it impossible. Colani, in his study of the first nine volumes of the Rougon-Macquart series, also took up the question of the use of ignoble materials in the novel. The question, he said, was not whether Zola's works were immoral. The question was whether they could be read without repugnance.

When we consider the critical reaction to Zola's use of materials ordinarily foreign to the novel and the frequent objections to his handling of plot, characterization, and description, added to the charges of brutality and immorality which clouded the whole Rougon-Marquart series, it is little wonder that the validity of Zola's study of the human document as a theory of art came to be questioned. The gradually increasing sentiment against naturalism was intensified by *La Terre* in 1887, and the general trend toward a new ideal in literature was attested by Jules Huret in 1891 when he published the results of numerous interviews with many leading literary figures.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary critics for the most part disagreed with Zola's claim that in his novels he performed a work of science, of verity, and of morality. They rejected the validity of his science both on the grounds that his experimentation was not scientific in the real sense of the word and on the grounds that the novel could not be the instrument of a scientific experiment. The rejected his claim to verity asserting that it was falsified by insufficient or careless documentation and by his *a priori* concept of man as a "bête humaine." Zola's claim to morality, according to the majority of the contemporary critics, was invalidated by the immoral effects of the obscenity, the fatalistic philosophy, the irreligion and the lack of patriotism which they found in the whole Rougon-Marquart series.

Contemporary critics likewise made serious objections to the esthetic merit of Zola's novels, asserting that his plot and character development were often neglected in favor of description, which, in turn, was often excessive and boring. They also objected to the introduction into the novel of scientific pretensions, trade and technical terminology, and certain other materials not ordinarily considered the proper subjects of an artistic work.

VITA

Lucien Wendell White was born at Hillsdale, Illinois, on November 16, 1914. He received his secondary education at Moline High School and graduated *summa cum laude* from Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, in 1935. He has done graduate work at the University of Iowa, Middlebury College, and the University of Illinois, where he received the A. M. degree in 1944. During the year 1944-1945, he was a Fellow in French at the University of Illinois.

Since 1939, except for leaves of absence to continue graduate study, he has been a member of the modern language department of Augustana College.

He is a member of the French honorary society, Pi Delta Phi.